

Wilderness Trail Report

Summit Valley Trail (8.1 miles)

South Kelsey Trail: Section from Smith River NRA trailhead to Gunbarrel Trail/Gunbarrel Camp (8 miles).

Date (s) of visit: 7/17/2014-7/20/2014

Trail Obstructions

The Summit Valley Trail had a few fallen trees that were easily navigable on the trail. ~5 trees were avoided in the first mile.





The South Kelsey Trail had around 10 trees that forced new user paths to avoid large fallen trees. There is also a nasty little meadow/field spotted with thistles and heinous blackberries in route to the Gunbarrel camp (~2.6 miles from the Gunbarrel camp) long pants are advised or prepare to get a licking.

Below are images of obstructions on the South Kelsey Trail:





Largest, most troublesome obstruction; a distinguished user path is being established to route oneself down the slope and back up to the trail around this fallen bay laurel.

Were the obstructions navigable by stock animals? Some are more difficult than others. On the South Kelsey trail many are not navigable. The Summit Valley trail most trees are navigable. A pretty steep washout exists on the South Kelsey trail en route to Gunbarrel about 2 miles from the Gunbarrel campsite; this may be challenging when stock camping.

Describe grazing areas/grasses growing:

Summit Valley trail has three very large meadows to graze in. The South Kelsey is much more cramped and the best grazing location would be at Gunbarrel camp.

Water access:

There were many dry or ephemeral streams along the summit valley trail. The only water available was a small pool, possibly from an underground spring, 45 feet southeast of the large Summit Valley campsite. This is the only access to water we found along the Summit Valley trail for another 6 miles. The second water access is marked by a yellow sign on the trail and appears as an arm of the Eight Mile Creek that intersects the trail on the map.

The South Kelsey Trail has plenty of water access with many streams and waterfalls on the trail and river/creek access at Buck creek, Eightmile creek, and Harrington Creek, all of which merge into the South Fork of the Smith River.

Campsite locations and quality:

Summit Valley meadow campsite is large, spacious, comfortable, and established. At the time of visit it was dry with a dirt/young grass surface. There were many flies and evidence of animal use including elk, deer, bears, and horses (tracks and scat). A beautiful open meadow spotted with various wild flowers and with great stars at night, on a clear night you can see the Milky Way! Water can be found 45 feet southeast on the trail in a very small, cool pool/possible underground spring. The mosquitos are less bothersome than the flies and bees which are so numerous that it feels as though the grass is humming. There is still debris left from the dilapidated Summit Valley shelter; caution is advised near shelter remains as broken glass and rusted nails or metal bits may be present. A photo of the remains is below.

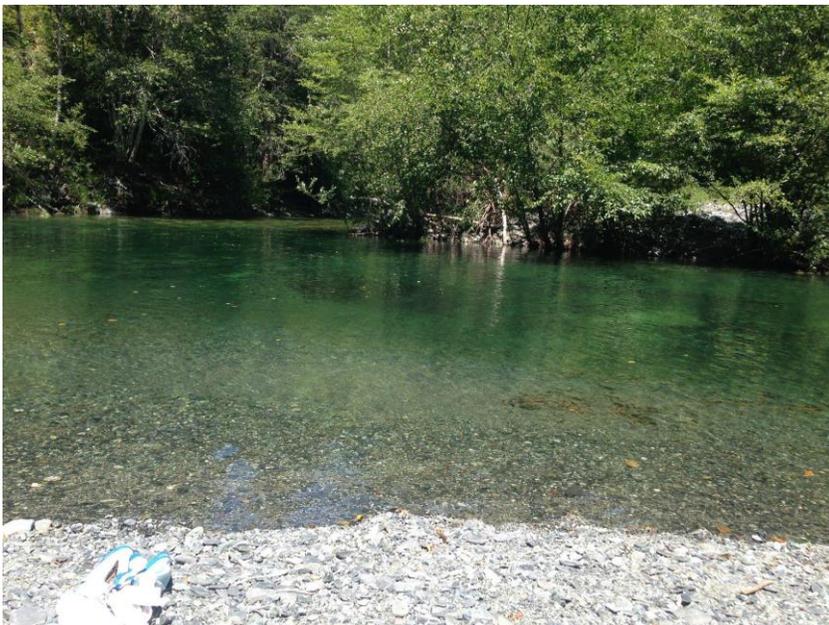


There is a small campsite located around 7-8 miles in from the trailhead (closest to the South Kelsey Trail junction) that is hidden among the oaks and madrones. It is about .25-.5 miles away from a branch of Eightmile Creek that had a decent amount of water flowing in it.

Campsite quantity—number and size of sites, number of people/tents that can fit in each site:

At Summit Valley meadow campsite there are three possible pre-established sites each site can fit 2-3 tents. The valley is large and more sites can easily be created, although this is not advised. Between Summit Valley and the spur trail to the Summit Valley Lookout site (0.1 miles before the junction) there is a large clearing on the ridge. The Lookout site provides many dispersed campsites on dry rocky soil. The campsites are not nearly as appealing or comfortable as the lower meadow campsite and are further away from the nearest water source. The same small dry rocky campsites have been established along the short spur trail to the Summit Valley Lookout site. The Lookout site offers spectacular views of the ridge tops and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Rubble from the old lookout is still present, with wires, metal, and glass concentrated in the area of its previous existence.

Plenty of comfortable campsites can be found along the South Kelsey Trail. The Eightmile Creek campsite is a small campsite with room for about 4 tents. There is a large campfire ring and a small bank near a beautiful swimming hole where Eightmile Creek meets with the South Fork of the Smith River. This is a quality campsite on soft moist forest floor surrounded by moss-covered rocks, ferns, alder, willow, and Douglas fir. Beautiful stands of the Port Orford cedar can be found along the trail. The mosquitos are bothersome near the campsite but one can find easy relief at the river bank. About a mile from Eightmile Creek the large Elkhorn Bar campsite holds over 6 campsites with room for multiple tents and easy river access. 3.5 miles from the Eightmile Creek campsite the Gunbarrel campsite holds about 3 different sites with each site holding room for 5-3 tents. Gunbarrel is very grassy and exposed, making it very hot in the summer. The ground is a bit hard and uneven in spots with dry dirt, but the campsites are many and convenient.



List wildlife seen and general location of sighting (mosquitos, bears, snakes, etc.):

Mosquitos were a pest along the South Kelsey Trail. There are plenty of signs of wildlife but no sightings. Mountain lion, Bobcat, and bear scat were a common sight.

Really cool birds were seen at Eightmile camp, including the American dipper, blue heron, and evidence of hawks and northern flickers.

There are also many types of butterflies!

Trail conditions:

How easy was the trail to follow (unlabeled forks, absent cairns, indistinct tread, etc.)?

The Summit Valley Trail is pretty easy to follow once you choose the correct direction to go after seeing the wilderness boundary near the trailhead (see comment in next section).

The South Kelsey Trail is easy to follow until reaching Gunbarrel Camp, and then one has to look for cairns and tread to find their way to Harrington Creek. There is some flagging across the creek as well as a trail sign. One must look out for the nest of flagging to find the turnoff to continue on the rest of the South Kelsey trail (be careful to not go too far and pass it!)

Were there trail signs (at forks, at trail head)?

There is no trail sign at the wilderness boundary on the Summit Valley Trail but there is one at the trailhead off the G-O Road. 0.5 mi from the trailhead the Summit Valley Trail flattens and splits continuing right, heading in the north-westerly direction. The Summit Valley Trail can be recognized by a Siskiyou wilderness sign; continuing straight will lead south and possibly to a road. We built a cairn to show the correct trail is to the right, not down to the left. There is a trail sign at the big meadow that is good for camping at.

The South Kelsey Trail has good signage until heading towards Gunbarrel Camp after Eightmile Creek. Mile markers are fading, and there is a fallen sign about 1 mile from Gunbarrel Camp. There is no trail sign after crossing Harrington Creek for the Gunbarrel Trail, only orange flagging tape across the river indicating a crossing area.

There is a graffitied sign at Buck Creek and the graffiti is later spotted at the Buck Creek Shelter.





How navigable were creek crossings?

Eightmile Creek is very navigable to cross; water is flowing slowly and in the shallowest sections comes up to mid-calf/knee. It is necessary to get in the water to cross.

Harrington Creek is a bit faster-flowing and comes up to the knee in the deepest sections. You can possibly avoid getting in the water to cross, but the rocks are slippery to stand on.

The South Fork of the Smith River is the fastest moving water to cross but the current is surprisingly manageable. It is deeper than the creeks, and, on average, will come up to the knee to mid-thigh.

Were there any burned-over areas?

There is a dry and possibly burned area (burned a while ago) section of the Summit Valley Trail, around 4-6 miles from the start of the trail. It is dense with tan oak, manzanita, brackens, and other disturbance-loving/chaparral plants.

Did you see any wildflowers or poison oak?

There is mallow, red paintbrush, poison hemlock, California rose, and Ladies tresses' (orchid) growing around and near the big meadow on the Summit Valley Trail. There are also Washington lilies, tiger lilies, and Bolander's lily throughout the Summit Valley Trail. Goatsbeard is blooming along the waterways, creeks, and rivers of the South Kelsey Trail as well as harvest brodiaea near the Buck Creek Shelter.

There are also wild blackberries and black raspberries ripe along the South Kelsey Trail.

There is some poison oak at the end of the Summit Valley Trail but it is predominantly along the South Kelsey Trail.